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ABSTRACT

All rehabilitation programs have some educational component. The case worker must be able to effectively evaluate the choices presented to the client, then assist the client in recognizing those choices that are valid and realistic. Often times new occupational positions require additional training. The counselor should keep in mind the client's intellectual potential, educational levels, physical tolerance, and goals. These issues can be explosive when designing the educational aspect of any rehabilitation program for if they are misjudged, they can have major cost and outcome consequences. The following is a set of questions designed to guide the assessment process: (1) Will the person be able to perform the job physically? (2) Does the client have the intellectual capacity to carry out the job? (3) How, and where, may training for the job be acquired? (4) Is this choice likely to lead to productive employment? (5) What are the client's actual academic levels? (6) What work needs to be done to have the client ready to enter a program? (7) How long is the preparation work likely to take? (8) Where should the preparatory work be carried out? (9) What is the best place to obtain the training program? (10) What special equipment or remedial assistance may be required? (11) What is the likely cost of the whole educational planning process? (BHK)

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The Importance of Educational Assessments in the Rehabilitation Process

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The Importance of Educational Assessments in the Rehabilitation Process

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All rehabilitation programmes have some educational component. These educational aspects of rehabilitation form a continuum ranging from such issues as training in pain management and learning to adjust to a new life-style through to skills training and formal academics.

When clients start to recognize that they are unlikely to be able to return to their previous occupations they begin to cast about for other options, options which usually involve at least some education or training. Sometimes the choices they make are quite realistic and realizable: often they are not. Nevertheless, the sponsoring case worker is faced with evaluating the choices and assisting the client in recognizing the wisdom of the choice or choices made. In most cases case workers are untrained for such tasks and, even when they are, they usually lack the necessary time to ensure that an adequate evaluation is carried out.

To be effective the career choice aspect of the rehabilitation process must first establish the following: intellectual potential, actual educational levels, true physical tolerance, and possible goals. There is little point in placing clients in educational programmes or job placements where they will face near certain failure. Far too often these issues are ignored resulting in substantial loses to the sponsoring agencies. Just as important, for the effect it has on costs, is that clients come to see rehabilitation as an impossible dream resigning themselves to remaining on disability allowances or to seeking increased compensation, if an insurance claim.

The amount of money which must be spent on a client's rehabilitative programme is frequently quite large. For this reason some case workers hesitate before recommending such action. But, if carefully and thoughtfully conducted, such programmes can return the client to the workforce at a cost far below what would be incurred were the client to remain as an ongoing charge of the agency. The client's intellectual potential, educational levels, physical tolerance, and goals, what they really are, not what they are assumed to be, thus become critical factors. These issues are frequently explosive ones when designing the educational aspect of any rehabilitation programme for if misjudged they can have major cost and outcome consequences.

These concerns must thus be dealt with, and they are best dealt with by someone with a complete understanding of the issues involved, before any programme is devised, if the needs of the clients and the sponsoring agencies are to be met. This is where the educational assessment specialist comes in.

Frequently the client and the case worker have established a tentative occupational goal and the purpose of the assessment is to establish the validity, or lack of it, of the goal, but more often establishing an goal is part of the assessment's purpose. Having worked in the field of adult special needs education field for almost twenty years one of my major tasks, in this specialized aspect of rehabilitation, has been to assist in the development a great many educational rehabilitative programmes. Over the years I have developed the following set of questions which I endeavour to answer when carrying out such an assessment, acting as a resource person to the case worker in the design of an overall programme plan.

1) Will the person be able to perform the job physically?

This is usually the most obvious concern and there are many resources which exist to provide evaluations which speak to it. It would be wise in this process to ensure that the client spends some time in a position which, as closely as possible, approximates an actual job situation rather than only a simulated work environment. In other words, assessments should be carried out by an agency which has the capacity to carry out at least part of the evaluation in a criterion referenced format.

2) Does the client have the intellectual capacity to carry out the job?

A psychological assessment is a most useful tool here, but one that should be used with caution. Cultural, environmental, social, and motivational factors can sometimes render the results of this form of evaluation invalid, or, at the very best, questionable, necessitating a careful interpretation of any such assessment. Again the educational assessor should be able to assist the case worker in the interpretation of such information.

3) How, and where, may training for the job be acquired?

This is not as simple as it looks, for programmes need to be carefully evaluated. Such factors as ease of access, method and style of instruction, and entry requirements need to be considered.

4) Is this choice likely to lead to productive employment?

This is a difficult decision and one which requires an understanding of the client as well as knowledge of job trends. An even more important factor to consider is whether job opportunities exist, or will exist, in the area where clients live or where they are prepared to re-locate.

5) What are the client's actual academic levels?

This is a key area. We know that grade levels today are frequently not a good indicator of a person's academic abilities for much publicity has been given to cases of high-school graduates who are barely literate. The real necessity is to ascertain whether or not the client has the prerequisite academic skills to allow successful completion of the proposed training. It is clearly a waste of time and money to enrol someone in a course where their efforts will be futile. A careful screening of functional skills is imperative if successful programme placement is to be ensured.

6) What work needs to be done to have the client ready to enter a programme?

Clients may be well suited for a course but, as stated above, lack the needed functional academic skills or have skills which are dated and require renewal. If this is the case you will need to know what skills are needed. This does not mean receiving a report which says that your client has a grade 10 level and will need grade 12. Information like that is close to useless. What you need to know is WHAT skills are at the grade 10 level and WHAT skills will need to be at the grade 12 level. What is needed is particular, not general, information if an efficient and cost effective plan is to be devised.

7) How long is the preparation work likely to take?

This is a key question, for such work, while it will save money in the long run if carried out successfully, is expensive. Given the many variables present when any adult returns to structured education, predictions in this area are not likely to be precise. However, when given by an experienced educational evaluator, such predictions can set limits which make realistic cost projections feasible.

8) Where should the preparatory work be carried out?

Not all preparatory work needs to be carried out by a formal educational institution. A good educational evaluation should make you aware of the many other cost effective options.

9) What is the best place to obtain the training programme?

As with preparatory work, many non-formal, cost effective, options are available. Choices should be clearly set out so that you and the client can make an informed choice.

10) What special equipment or remedial assistance may be required?

Once embarked on a particular rehabilitative programme the last thing you need to discover is that the client will require specialized equipment, such as a computer, or need extensive remedial help due to a learning disability. A comprehensive educational evaluation and plan should make you aware of the necessity for such expenditures BEFORE the commencement of any programme.

11) What is the likely cost of the whole educational planning process?

The bottom line issue. The key word here is likely. Any good educational plan should look at all issues which are possible to anticipate and set out cost parameters. It is not possible to predict costs to an absolute figure. It is possible to make reasonable estimates which allow for sensible, rational planning.

My years in the field of adult special needs education have demonstrated to me the benefit, in cost control and client satisfaction, of careful educational evaluation and planning. Once this is done the management of the case can be placed in the hands of an agency which specializes in rehabilitation case management with some assurance that the groundwork has been carefully laid for successful rehabilitation.